



Book Review

Inés Arroyo-Quiroz and Tanya Wyatt (eds) (2018) *Green Crime in Mexico: A Collection of Case Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

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Since the 1970s, various scientists, intellectuals and social activists have expressed their concern about the problems human activities have caused for the environment. This situation has encouraged the holding of several world summits and the signing of treaties with the aim of proposing solutions to stop environmental deterioration. In fact, one can find numerous statistics of the main problems that affect the different regions of the planet. For example, in Latin America, there are serious problems such as noise and air pollution, wildlife trafficking, clandestine mining, fracking, water pollution and deforestation. Some of these problems are addressed in the book *Green Crime in Mexico: A Collection of Case Studies* (2018). Its editors, Inés Arroyo-Quiroz and Tanya Wyatt, explain that the book seeks to contribute to public awareness about environmental degradation, an issue that, at least up until now, has been the concern or interest of only a small sector of the global population.

In Mexico, there is a perception that deforestation and lack of drinking water are the main environmental problems. In fact, these have been categorised as national security issues and with regard to the issue of water, the editors warn about its scarcity, inaccessibility, poor quality and pollution by industrial waste, among other problems. Regarding deforestation, they mention this causes erosion of the Earth's surface, contributing to the deterioration of agricultural lands and desertification, which in turn causes migration from rural areas. By not thinking of nature as an entity, crimes and damage to the environment are not considered, but this is an aspect studied by the discipline called green criminology, whose foundations, according to Arroyo-Quiroz and Wyatt, are unknown in the Mexican academic milieu. They verified this through an investigation of the legal and illegal trade of wildlife between Mexico and the European Union. To carry out their investigation, they searched for information in various databases and interviewed experts. As a result, they conclude that green criminology as a formal study field is not well known in Mexico, but that there is an interest in learning its methodology. For this reason, a course was organised for academics interested in the subject matter. As an outcome, 14 texts—which now constitute this book—were prepared by the participants. These essays are grouped into four main themes: environmental justice, crimes committed by powerful companies, corruption and resistance to ecological crimes.

It is worthwhile mentioning what is said about environmental justice, understood as discrimination in access to environmental resources and the differential victimisation that occurs in relation to environmental degradation. An example is the poor Indigenous communities that

directly suffer the consequences of a destructive neoliberal policy that promotes economic development without considering environmental regulations and people's voices. This can be observed in three of the studied cases. First, Sofía Cortés reviewed the actions taken by the community of Cherán, Michoacán, to stop illegal logging. The author recalls that this area has been subject to great deforestation due to a dispute between the state, private companies and the local Indigenous communities and due to collusion between logging corporations and organised crime. Cherán and its forests have suffered excessive exploitation, a situation that led to the loss of more than 9,000 hectares between 2006 and 2012. The presence of criminal groups has turned clandestine deforestation into clandestine—paramilitarised—deforestation, as protection has been provided to illicit loggers to support their actions. These criminal acts have constituted a dispossession—or theft—of resources from the communities which, in response, have sought to develop defence strategies to try to reappropriate their territory through traditional practices and an autonomous government. What happened in Cherán is not exclusive to this area, as the author indicates there are other regions in Mexico with self-defence groups. People in Mexico are tired of corruption and a weak state and are willing to protect natural resources. For example, according to Wilber Huerta, local communities in the vicinity of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, also in Michoacán, formed inspection committees to deter clandestine logging, over-exploitation of forests and irregular agricultural practices, in addition to supporting federal, state and municipal operations in the area. Addressing the problem of illegal logging is particularly important, since this is the cause of eight per cent of the annual deforestation in Mexico. In this regard, Huerta suggests that it is important to differentiate small-scale logging from large-scale exploitation exercised by organised crime groups in collusion with certain authorities.

With regard to the problems derived from non-consensual management of natural resources, Yajaira García points out that although it is true that renewable energies constitute an alternative to use of fossil fuels, it is not possible to ignore the fact that these practices have negative impacts on biodiversity, as in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca. Here, various 'green' companies have installed wind power plants to generate electricity. The construction of wind turbines began in 1994 but developed fast between 2003 and 2006 following the arrival of Spanish, Italian and French transnational companies. In addition to the environmental impact derived from the establishment of wind turbines in one of Mexico's areas with the greatest cultural and biological diversity, the companies operate these systems through unsustainable and unfair practices. Companies have presented environmental impact assessments but with notable omissions and without evaluating their impact on the ecosystems. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec happens to be a corridor of migratory and endemic neotropical species. It should be added that negotiations with communities have been characterised by the presence of corrupt authorities, inequity and irregularities that have prompted some groups to defend their rights. For example, in Barra de Santa Teresa, a wind park construction project was cancelled because the communities considered that the economic benefits were not distributed equally among landowners. According to García, wind parks are an example of how transnational corporations cause environmental damage and create social conflicts.

To ensure that environmental justice prevails in these cases, negotiation mechanisms with companies and governments must ensure that social and economic inequalities are eliminated, and that environmental damage is recognised as a crime. Arroyo-Quiroz and Wyatt warn that the ultimate goal of environmental justice is to reduce environmental degradation to establish a healthy and safe planet. In this way, it would be interesting to present to public scrutiny those corporations that in their longing to maximise profits, do not show any kind of respect for nature. Likewise, the state must be questioned about why it hides information about green crimes allowing companies to ignore environmental protection measures, obtain large extensions of land and gain access to natural resources owned by local communities. An example of this is described by Misael Morales, a case involving the company *Buenavista del Cobre*, which due to a 'failure' in its pipeline system, spilled 40,000 cubic metres of copper sulphate into Las Tinajas stream, Cananea, Sonora, causing damage to the soil, subsoil and water quality in the area. In this case,

the company did not comply with the specifications set out by the official Mexican standards. Although the Ministry of Environment made a statement on responsibility, the operating permit was not revoked and apparently, the investigation has been closed.

Another similar situation is presented by Paulina Díaz about Cuatro Ciénegas, a natural protected area in Coahuila, where various green criminal activities have taken place: extraction of plaster cast, irresponsible tourism, introduction of non-native species, extraction of endemic species, clearing, and above all, water extraction by private companies. The extraction of water from this protected area mainly for agricultural purposes (alfalfa fields), has led to the drying out of pools and lagoons and the disappearance of fish, bacteria and snails from a prehistoric ecosystem that survived for several million years but was lost in less than one year because of private interests. The director of the Reserve denied the damage; however, investigations proved otherwise. Although the Mexican president, the Governor of Coahuila and pertinent authorities promised to recover the aquifer, no action has been taken from the public sector. With the intention of overhauling the damage caused, one of the companies involved in the problem decided to change the diet of cattle to reduce water consumption, but this action was not enough to prevent the loss of biodiversity. In this case, political and private interests colluded to create a malleable regulatory framework that allowed irreversible environmental damage. Adriana González also draws attention to natural protected areas affected by another malpractice, the extraction of shale gas (known as fracking) that causes various harms in the ecosystem, increases greenhouse gas emissions and pollutes water systems.

The rest of the chapters included in the book are concerned with other important issues, such as the effects caused by large urban projects (Martínez Trejo), the impact of tree-clearing programs (Corral Flores), the chance of reversing imposed sanctions (Martínez Santoyo), illegal wildlife trade (Carrillo Páez; Jiménez Bustamante and Díaz Rentería; and, Alvarado Martínez and Martínez) and the traditional sale of birds (Roldán Clarà). These examples confirm that green crimes in Mexico are mostly a consequence of authorities' negligence and the actions undertaken by criminal organisations and transnational companies seeking to obtain huge profits without any consideration for the environment. To find solutions, Arroyo-Quiroz and Wyatt argue that society must be involved at all levels, and scientists must gather and analyse the evidence and present the results to politicians and business leaders, with such formulations being supported by economists and criminologists. In this crusade, the state and corporations should have an essential role as participants, because solutions should not be based on prohibition but on regulation and cooperation; policies should be intended to harmonise the economic, political, urban, environmental and economic aspects of responses.

To conclude, I have no doubt that the book *Green Criminology in Mexico* is a significant contribution to studies on environmental issues, which surely will help to stimulate interest in this subject. As indicated by the editors, the field of green criminology should become a priority for developing theories aimed at helping to understand ecological crimes and propose solutions to prevent them.

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